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ABSTRACT

An evaluation was conducted of the effectiveness of the Adult Educators Development Project (AEDP) at Lehman College of the City University of New York, a 3-year professional development program combining meetings, research projects, site visits, reading, and writing that was designed to facilitate the professional development of instructors in adult basic education, literacy, and English for speakers of other languages. Data for the evaluation were obtained from interviews of a total of 11 participants from the project's 3 program years, limited observations of the program seminars, and a review of various project documents. According to the participants interviewed, the project objectives were initially unclear difficult to grasp, thus fostering a sense of disorientation and confusion. Eventually, a process of empirical inquiry was initiated at the project sites, and the AEDP's goals were brought into clearer focus. Most literacy teachers and administrators who participated in the AEDP praised it as a vehicle for professional and personal development. The project seminars, site visits, and emphasis on alternative assessment were considered especially valuable. Only a few minor criticisms of the AEDP project were expressed, and it was deemed worth repeating and expanding. (Appended is information about the study sample.) (MN)

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Working Paper 3

An Evaluation of the Adult Educators Development Project Lehman College City University of New York

Peter Medway

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Working Paper 3

An Evaluation of the Adult Educators Development Project Lehman College City University of New York

Peter Medway

Centre for Research on Language in Education and Work
Carleton University
Ottawa, Canada

September 1993

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I BACKGROUND

1 About this report

This is the report of an evaluative study, conducted over the academic year 1991-92, of the Adult Educators Development Project at Lehman College of the City University of New York. The Adult Educators Development Project is a program of the Institute for Literacy Studies, Lehman College. The AEDP received its primary funding from the Fund for Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) and had additional support from the Aaron Diamond Foundation, the National Center for Adult Literacy, and from local agencies in the New York City Adult Literacy Initiative including the Community Development Agency, the New York City Board of Education, the City University of New York, and the New York Public Library.

The scale of available funding dictated a relatively 'light' study. Data was collected by interview (with team and participants), some limited observation (of seminars), and study of documents. Observation of the participants' teaching and interviews with their students were not possible. Three visits, each extending over two or three days, were made to the project.

Documents studied covered a wide range: project documents produced for team, participant, and external readerships; existing interview transcripts generated by an earlier study involving some of the participants; participants' letters and forms of application; and written work by participants (journals and research projects).

The team was formally interviewed once. In addition I had regular conversation with them, face-to-face and by telephone, as well as communications by mail and fax. Two visit reports were submitted to the team for comment in the course of the year. Feedback from these helped to ensure that the questions I addressed included ones the team considered significant as well as those arising out of my own evaluation perspective.

A sample of participants was constructed (for details see Appendix). These were interviewed as follows during the 1991-92 academic year:

1989 intake	3	once, in February
1990 intake	4	once, in February
1991 intake	4	twice, in November and April

The intention behind the last visit was to note changes over the course of

participation in the first-year AEDP program. In the report I have generally tried to preserve the anonymity of the informants.

Parts of three seminars were observed at about the times of the interviews: a seminar in the follow-up program of the 1990 intake was observed in February, and seminars in the current first-year program in November and April.

Funding limits precluded the transcription of interview recordings. Instead, written notes were produced, at the time and from the recordings, which conveyed the sense and, over many stretches, the exact wording of the testimony. Where necessary the tapes were consulted for clarification and to supply gaps in the notes. Although it may be taken that the latter are a relatively faithful record, what informants told me in interviews will here generally be reported as indirect speech, to avoid giving a misleading impression of verbatim quotation. This report was written from some hundred pages of such notes and a large collection of documents. (Citations from my notes are indicated with quotation marks, indentation, and references to the source.)

In this report I seek to give a sense of the work and circumstances of the teachers who attended AEDP, and to convey something of the experience of the project as well as evaluating its effectiveness. Directly evaluative comment does not appear until well into Part II, where the most important statements are printed in bold. These statements are gathered together, along with some recommendations, in section 8.

In Lehman College and at the participants' sites I was invariably received with warmth and hospitality. Teachers and project team members gave their time generously and did their best to help me, often going out of their way to find documents and sometimes answering my additional queries by mail. It was a rewarding and memorable experience visiting such a range of engaging and talented individuals working with dedication and often great creativity in the most diverse conditions across three of the City's boroughs. I thank them all for their help.

2 The Adult Literacy Education scene in New York City

2.1 The provision

Like all large cities in the industrialised world New York has many adults who

lack the education necessary to obtain and keep jobs which demand more than elementary manual or interpersonal skills, or to gain access to and and benefit from college education. The problem in New York is more acute than in many cities because of the large number of immigrants who lack both education and knowledge of English. But even without this group the situation would be difficult: a disturbing proportion of the established population has inadequate education for contemporary needs. The lack is experienced as a problem not only by the city but by people themselves, many of whom actively seek education for goals which are personal as well as job-related; to be able, for instance, to read the newspaper or help children with homework.

To tackle this problem help exists in the form of programs with various names, amongst them Adult Basic Education (ABE), adult literacy education, and education in English as a Second or Other Language (ESOL). ESOL may be taught in the same program as basic or literacy education, or separately. By contrast with other education provided for adults in colleges and universities, these programs tend to be characterised (though with exceptions) by low status, poor resources and piecemeal provision. In New York City there are a number of provider systems, the separate efforts of which are coordinated by the New York Adult Literacy Initiative. These providers are the Board of Education, certain colleges of The City University of New York, three library systems, and community-based organizations. Although there is variation in the nature and purposes of the provision, the goal is generally to move students through officially defined levels and into the General Educational Development (GED) program. The GED certificate is the objective for many students and is believed to bring access to college education and jobs. In more general terms the adult education programs seek to improve literacy and mathematical skills, and sometimes also social and life skills and knowledge for surviving in the society; many educators also involve students in critical examination of social issues. Beyond the basic level some programs working towards the GED follow the core of the high school curriculum. (In one program visited on the evaluation, for instance, each evening session is divided into three sections: the first hour is reading, with content from science and social studies, the second is mathematics and the third is writing.) Other programs incorporate vocational education, e.g. for clerical occupations.

2.2 The teachers

Of especial relevance for this report is the absence of an institutionalised profession of adult educators. There is no generally recognised pre-service training or accreditation. Few teachers have security of employment beyond the current year (some Board of Education teachers are an exception); many are paid by the hour; others are unpaid volunteers. The prior experience and

qualifications of the teachers, and their motives for taking up the work, are correspondingly varied. In some sectors the teachers are a shifting population, for the most part remaining in a job, or in adult literacy or ESOL, for only short periods; other sectors are more stable.

Given these circumstances, it is not surprising that there are worries about the general quality of literacy/ESOL provision for adults. The same circumstances, however, make it difficult to attempt system-wide improvement. In so far as the problem is one of teacher expertise, there exist neither an organizational structure through which a training program could reach all the teachers, nor the finance to support teacher time spent out of the classroom in in-service training. Where voluntary training sessions are offered they are often not attended by hourly paid teachers, who may lack the necessary motivation, or the time. One of the participants in AEDP, for instance, described how 'she and her colleagues work thirty hours without preparation time and have to do other jobs in order to live. At meetings which she's attended, any ideas that involve more time are simply dismissed' *(Interview)*.

2.3 Assessment in adult literacy/ESOL

Many programs set as objectives the attainment by their students of particular levels measured by state and city mandated tests: for beginning students the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) and for ESOL students the John and its replacement, the New York State Place Test. Transfer from the basic programs to GED programs may be determined by scores on the TABE or on GED practice tests. Within programs, students may be allocated to groups or 'levels' on the basis of TABE.

These tests, which in form are standardized measures designed to be administered to large numbers and to yield numerical scores, exert a powerful influence on teaching, and result in a greater resemblance between the programs than the institutional diversity would suggest. Accordingly, the assessment process is a point at which leverage can be exerted on teaching across the system, and attempts to change assessment may be motivated by a desire to improve teaching. There is a widespread view that the TABE and GED procedures can have anti-educational effects on programs, making it harder for students to acquire skills and knowledge of which they stand most in need. Reform of assessment, however, is sought not simply for its washback effect on teaching. There is concern also, felt by experts in the Institute for Literacy Studies amongst others, that the procedures are deficient *as assessment* and generate information which can be inadequate and even misleading.

3 The Adult Educators Development Project: intentions and design

The project on which this study reports arose out of an immediate concern with these assessment processes and a more general concern with the quality of teaching in adult literacy education and ESOL. The Adult Educators Development Project is described in the official proposal documents as

> ... a collaborative staff development initiative for selected teams of adult literacy teachers working in four diverse settings in New York City: CUNY colleges, community organizations, libraries, and schools. Through activities including a staff development seminar, program-based student observations and interviews, and the development and field-testing of curricula and classroom-based assessment procedures, the AEDP seeks to enhance the professional development of literacy teachers while redefining and reforming critical relationships between curriculum and assessment in adult literacy education.

The current project team are Marcie Wolfe, Director (on childcare leave for the period of the evaluation); Karen Griswold, Associate Director; Lena Townsend and Deborah Shelton, 1989-90 participants who joined the team during the second year. All have extensive experience in adult education. The Director has made explicit the project's theoretical position on literacy and assessment in a co-authored paper published by ERIC (Susan L. Lytle and Marcie Wolfe, 'Adult Literacy Education: Program Evaluation and Learner Assessment'). The project's key ideas and positions will be amply illustrated in the material that follows and will not be spelled out at this point (see, for instance, 6.1, 7).

History. AEDP's three-year program began in September 1989 and ends in August 1992. As was the intention, recruitment in each year drew from the four principal providers of literacy and ESOL education for adults: CUNY colleges, community-based organizations under the administration of the Community Development Agency, public libraries, and the Board of Education. (The community organizations represented were Bronx Educational Services, DC 37, Church Avenue Merchants Block Association, Henry Street Settlement House, Literacy Volunteers of New York City, the National Puerto Rican Forum, and the Young Men's/Young Women's Hebrew Association.) The 1989 intake comprised 19 participants, the 1990 20 and the 1991 21. Because lead-time before the start of the first seminar series was short, the team were compelled to select the initial intake without the careful review procedure which had been planned. As a result problems arose with this group (see below, 5.2) which were able to be avoided in the subsequent years,

when all applicants were interviewed. Administrators (the term lacks clear definition in adult literacy education) were among those admitted as participants, a decision taken by the team with some hesitation due to worries that their presence would inhibit teachers from speaking freely (see below, 6.1).

In order that participants would be able to attend the seminars on Fridays during working hours (as well as some in their own time at weekends), organizations agreed to fund their release. Participants were offered payment for their curriculum development work, or tuition fee waivers to the same value for Lehman College graduate credit. I was unable to assess how important these rewards were as incentives to participate or persist in AEDP.

The expectation was that the first two intakes would each continue their involvement for a second year. The numbers who did so (though not the experience they received) were a disappointment to the team. Of the 1989 intake, 11 agreed to continue for a second year; of the 1990 intake five continued. A reason why many participants did not return for the second year was the difficulty of getting release time from their programs. One participant who did continue from the original intake said that even she and her colleague, who came from an organization strongly supportive of AEDP, had had to 'sneak out' unofficially to attend the follow-up year's seminars. Some other participants, she thought, simply lacked the commitment to continue into the second year.

4 The participants and their work

4.1 Jobs, careers and work contexts

The participants I studied worked at the following jobs. Two worked for Board of Education Basic Education programs. One taught a Board of Education clerical, pre-vocational education program. One taught for sixteen hours a week at the Adult Learning Center of a CUNY college. Two worked as ABE (Adult Basic Education) instructors for a local community organization. One of these had a second job as an ESOL teacher for the program in which another participant was an administrator; in ABE she prepared students for the GED in a program aiming to make people more employable. One started the year with a community organization teaching ESOL and basic education but moved in January to the CUNY college Adult Learning Center at which the participant mentioned above already worked.

The jobs of the participants who were administrators were as follows: one

worked for a community organization mainly as coordinator of two sites (she also did half a day's teaching at another site and worked one day a week as a teacher for a different organization). A second coordinated a community college program preparing people for employment (see below, 4.5). Finally, two were site advisers for the Centers for Reading and Writing, The New York Public Library.

The diversity of career background of the eleven teachers was typical of adult educators generally. Some had qualifications, with or without experience, in elementary or high school education; several had worked in government or commerce; one had been a musician, one a community worker; one was a writer. None had come straight to adult education from college; all had entered the field as a result of chance opportunities, of experiencing and liking some other sort of work with adults, of dissatisfaction with their existing job and consciously looking for an alternative, or from part-time volunteer work as literacy tutors.

The physical and institutional settings in which the eleven teachers worked varied a great deal, though the situations and backgrounds of their students had much in common. Five brief descriptions will serve to indicate the range and the commonalities.

Part of one person's job in the Adult Learning Center of a CUNY college was the coordination of the Student Literacy Corps Project, a US Department of Education initiative which involved training undergraduate students in the college to work as tutors to a group of adult students who were producing a community newspaper. For her other three days this teacher taught a mixed Level 2-4 class comprising mainly Latina women whose youngest children had now started school and who came for improvement in reading and writing. Some, mainly the men, had the GED as their goal. Although they had job aspirations, the teacher saw their main ambition as a more general desire to cope better with everyday demands, know more and understand the world.

The teacher who had recently moved to the Center had been teaching ESOL in a quite different setting. Her students had been mainly Latinos (and a family of three Senegalese) and a more varied basic education group, some with Spanish as their first language, some who grew up in the United States, and a couple from Jamaica, West Indies. The suggested duration of the program for individual students is three years; GED is a distant prospect for most. The site where I first talked to this teacher, like the sites where several participants worked, was in a poor area where visitors like myself were advised to exercise care for their safety.

A third participant taught her clerical, pre-vocational course in a shabby, though once elegant, typing room in an old school building in a run-down area. The students, mainly mature women with low scores on the TABE test, wished to gain skills which would give them access to better jobs. This teacher was generally successful in getting the students within a few months to the point where they could join the GED class.

A fourth teacher taught in a community based education project in what had been a stylish old parsonage in another poor area. The objective of the new program on which she taught was to get students to a stage where they could handle entry-level jobs. The students, some twenty of them, all women, had been required to attend and given travel money to the program by the agency which administers their welfare payments, the Human Resource Administration of the Office of Employment Services. The situation of these students was typical of many in adult literacy and ESOL programs. All were mothers, mostly single parents, in their late twenties to early forties, some with grown children. This was their first experience of education since dropping out of school, where they had acquired a sense of themselves as inadequate and unable to learn. In the teacher's words, they had arrived flustered, confused, anti-system, and with some hostility, saying 'Here I am again, back in school'.

The 36 hours a week which a fifth teacher worked for the Board of Education were divided between literacy in the mornings and, in the afternoon, GED, which he preferred because of its content base and the social issues it allowed him to bring in. His site was, in his account, isolated, 'in a project at the end of a bus line where middle class folks don't come'.

4.2 Teaching adult literacy/ESOLS

From what the teachers told me and wrote for their AEDP assignments I was able to learn something of how they went about their job of teaching adult literacy/ESOL. There was wide diversity, both in reported practice and in articulated rationale. For example, the mechanics of writing were generally taken seriously, but attention to these was associated in some cases with tightly controlled and bounded work (e.g. writing single sentences, reading in sequence through all the books in a published scheme) and in others with activities in which students had choice and could engage with themes that were important to them (e.g. reading chosen books on Black history or writing on issues such as bringing up children). The two tendencies seemed to reflect attitudes and beliefs about the students, emphasising on the one hand the great difficulties they experienced and on the other the inner resources they brought with them. (It was clearly an intention of AEDP to swing participants towards

the latter position, or to confirm the convictions of those who already espoused it.)

Characteristics of approaches consistent with AEDP thinking (though not necessarily derived from AEDP) were:

- *Seeking out materials with which to replace published reading schemes*, to reflect participants' concerns and life-themes and include a wide range of genres. A teacher, for instance, who several times mentioned this task as the one that most preoccupied her contrasted the materials she needed (e.g. on Black issues) with GED reading matter which she saw as oriented towards middle-class values. Unusually in ABE/ESOL programs, her students read poetry, in which they 'at first found little sense but now actively sought meaning' *(Interview)*.

- *Working to overcome students' fear and distrust of education.* This might involve making a supportive community out of the group: the class of the teacher just referred to had after five months become an interactive network that provided affective satisfactions and a focus of social activity such as shopping together. More centrally it involved giving students confidence that they could learn and experience of the enjoyment of learning: in that class and in some others the initial breakthrough had come in mathematics; in one it had come with the writing of an autobiographical piece.

- Some teachers believed that a source of their effectiveness was their *communication to the students of a sense of shared experience.* One teacher

> 'considers he could have been a writer but the model of his father, a journalist, militated against his finding a voice of his own. Now, although he feels more confident about his own writing, he says his desire to find a voice still coincides with that of his students; he is no different from his students. He discusses this with them all the time: they see him as an author. They need warmth and support. The group is like a working family' *(Interview)*.

- *Combining attention to form (especially spelling) with the making and communication of meaning.* One teacher, for example, moved in the account she offered of her work over the last couple of weeks from 'having the students write words that they wanted to learn, then asking them to compare words with similar patterns like "flame" and

"blame"', to 'listening to their conversations outside the classroom for themes that could come up and be dealt with and written about in class, things that are important to them': for example, childhood, and what makes people tense *(Interview)*. In another class, 'The topics are ones of their choice and they really do talk and write about topics of concern, for example, the homelessness, crime in the city, raising children' *(Interview)*. The topics students chose in these programs were not only current issues: one class wished to study Ancient Egypt, so the teacher 'has been learning all about the topic over the vacation and has found useful mileage for her literacy work in the stuff about hieroglyphics' *(Interview)*.

- *Providing plentiful experience of continuous reading and writing*. 'The method is basically to get them to do it and to provide strategies and techniques. Getting them to sit there and seriously read and do writing is the main part. Help can be anything from providing time and opportunity to providing a word' *(Interview)*.

- *The use of reading and writing to support each other*. 'Collaborative writing is used as a reading text for the group. If an individual seems to have liked the text, they write the version which they would like. It helps that everybody has a piece of text by them when they're writing: it alleviates the fear' *(Interview)*.

- *Recognising that adult learners were different from elementary and school students*, even though what was being learned might sometimes be similar. Such a recognition entailed more democratic ways of proceeding: thus one teacher structured times for collective decisions about the ways the class was run. It also entailed a different attitude towards attendance and punctuality. As she explained:

> 'with these adults you can't say, "You have to be here," as you might to children. Nor can you say "This is like a job and we expect punctuality and attendance". This sort of context has to be structured in quite different terms from the school. It's more fluid and less rigid. The people we're working with have cares and responsibilities and cannot be accused of non-commitment because they don't attend regularly' *(Interview)*.

While the most experienced teachers had no shortage of strategies and confidence in tackling the formidable problems they faced, the inexperienced teacher operating in isolation with a minimum of support could feel overwhelmed by the difficulty of the task. In such a situation one teacher,

perhaps needing a strategy which was definite and concrete and would (as it seemed) allow progress to be clearly seen, relied heavily on a published reading scheme and teaching of formal features (word meanings and spellings, word endings, singular and plural, possession, writing personal and business letters, and grammar, including parts of speech (which she considered hard to teach to adults: 'They know it but then they use the wrong part anyway'). This seemed an example of the teaching style cited as a problem in the original AEDP proposal: 'In this model, reading and writing are thought of as being learned from practice with their component "skills". In reading, this subskill approach may include practice with recognizing main ideas, inferring meanings, or memorizing vocabulary; in writing, it may include practice with words and types of sentences' (*Proposal*, p. 2).

This teacher's perception of her students was dominated by their apparent inability to learn:

> 'They have real problems and she stressed that it was very difficult teaching them. They don't remember a word from one time to the next and she wonders whether they will always be in her class and never make progress out. It's very hard to get them to make progress. There's a great deal of absence, some of it for personal reasons but some of it just lack of commitment. This makes it very difficult to work with a whole class as a class' *(Interview)*.

The latter observation contrasted strikingly with another teacher's testimony that regular attendance in class had risen from 2-4 to 15-18, as a result of effective teaching.

Even for experienced and successful practitioners, following the educational principles indicated above was not straightforward. A pedagogical dilemma which came up in several interviews was how far respect for students' perceptions and wishes should be extended to their views of appropriate curriculum and pedagogy. While teachers might seek to offer a wide range of learning experiences, students often objected that some were not relevant to preparation for the GED. One teacher's approach was to talk them out of this attitude and convince them that everything they did was a preparation, more or less direct. Another experienced a real tension in this area, while acknowledging that the problem was probably less acute in her context, the public library, than in Board of Education settings since in a library people did not expect a structured classroom. She tackled the students' educational ideas directly by enlisting experienced students to talk to them about learning techniques.

Others, however, felt it was necessary -- tactically but also perhaps on principle -- to give some acknowledgement to the rights of students to determine what was good for them. Thus, although one teacher 'does not share her students' enthusiasm for dictation, she feels that because they think it's important and get a great sense of accomplishment when they've mastered it, she has to provide it' *(Interview)*. Another straightforwardly 'gives the students what they want as well as pursuing his own agendas. They want spelling so he does it Mondays and Fridays, with a test each Friday' *(Interview)*.

Members of the group had discussed the issue among themselves. One participant described how she

> 'had been disturbed that students in her basic education class were rebelling and saying they did not want to take the local planned hospital waste incinerator as a crucial issue. They hadn't come to school for this; it was boring, their opinions wouldn't make a difference. She had asked another participant how to convince the students, and had received the response that these were adults who knew what their priorities were and that we should accept their agendas' *(Interview)*.

A frustration which participants experienced with the standard tests was the inability of these to register the types of progress which were most important in day-to-day work with students. An example of achievement which was highly significant to the teacher but which would pass unrecognised by the tests is contained in the following testimony:

> 'Some students are terrified of writing. One student would not let [the teacher] see the drafts for three months. When that battle was won it was a liberation. [The teacher] had to persuade her hard to invent spellings. A student who three years ago was writing two sentences now writes pages of well-composed text, small essays, about her life. [The teacher] doesn't know exactly how she got there. It's to do with an increase in confidence and the belief in having something to say and also support from the class. She's also reading better. Punctuation and spelling are still not right and syntax is not standard English but the writing is clear. When she learned in this cycle to understand the paragraph, that was an illumination. She was then able to organize her thoughts in a more complex way' *(Interview)*.

Such stories help explain the strength of the desire for forms of assessment capable of recognising teachers' and students' significant successes.

4.3 Control over teaching

None of the teachers complained that restrictive program policies or supervision prevented them from teaching the way they wanted to. In some cases it appeared that management did not have the resources to oversee the teachers in any case. Supervision could be intermittent (and not necessarily helpful): 'The coordinator visits from time to time and, when he observes, requires that [the teacher] teach a whole class lesson. But mostly nobody tells you what to do' *(Interview)*. Some participants, however, felt, positively, that they were encouraged to take initiatives. Typical testimony was:

> 'She finds there's little restriction from her superiors. She has a lot of freedom. Teachers are encouraged to devise their own methods' *(Interview)*.

> 'She has considerable freedom to write her own program. There are few constraints on her if she wants to change or innovate' *(Interview)*.

The team described to me two types of institutional constraint which I did not encounter in my interviews. One was the strength of existing institutionalized routines: a group who had attended AEDP from the same program seemed simply to have confirmed each other in practices they had already established. The other was exemplified by

> '... a success which caused problems: a participant in the first group had come to question the practices in her own institution and indeed had involved the students in this questioning. As a result she had come up against the program's management and finally had to leave. She no longer works in Adult Basic Education' *(Interview, project team)*.

4.4 Assessment in the teachers' work

Assessment as a requirement. The standardized TABE and/or GED tests were the official determinants of success in a number of programs. ABE students above the third grade level take the TABE at intervals, and ESOL students the JOHN test, now being replaced by the New York State Place Test. The tests were also widely used for the assessment and placement of new intakes. Students also took an entrance test to move from ABE or ESOL to GED programs (the test might be a practice version of GED). The only program, of those my sample represented, in which these tests were not significant goals was the New York Public Library tutorial program (as opposed to the classes which the library also ran); the TABE test which that

organization had formerly chosen to use (though not required to) had been dropped.

Reservations which participants expressed about the tests were as follows:

> The GED: said to show middle class bias, to be based on reading alone, and to fail to encourage critical thinking. Used as a summative measure it could give misleading indications of what a student could do, as in one program in which students made their own decision about when to enter themselves for the GED: here even ABE students assessed by TABE at Level 1 had passed *(Interview)*.
>
> The TABE: 'TABE does tell you something (Level 2 really is different from Level 9). The trouble with it is that those who are good at it crow' while the rest are demoralised *(Interview)*.
>
> Nationally standardized tests in general, used for placements, 'do not satisfactorily indicate where students should be placed. The test situation makes the students tense. [Informant's] experience is that people who score quite highly may still have major difficulties which the tests fail to pick up. And they say nothing about writing' *(Interview)*.

Teachers' own assessment practices. Whether or not their students were submitted at key stages to the standardized statewide tests, teachers often employed forms of assessment of their program's or their own devising. At the sites which she coordinated, although her agency required TABE as the instrument of placement and assessment, one administrator assigned students to their writing class on the basis of a writing sample which she assessed in a holistic way in consultation with the tutor. In this program there was a general testing, open to any member of the public, one week before the end of each term and one week before the start of the new term.

A problem faced by AEDP was the mistaken belief of some participants that certain assessment practices they maintained were consistent with the principles the project was recommending. One participant, for instance, had been an active designer of assessment tools within a particular vocational area; an example was 'simple' lists of subskills which she claimed a new teacher could easily follow but which, in the AEDP perspective, might be seen as failing to take account of the integratedness of the operations involved. Again, a teacher's routine daily notes which she referred to in the interview as an

example of on-going assessment in the spirit of AEDP, turned out to be numerical grades; the criteria were written up in booklets for her colleagues (who, however, had rejected their application as too elaborate). Self-evaluation by students is a procedure recommended by AEDP, but the printed form used for the purpose in one classroom, while appropriately inviting students to name their most successful areas, what they enjoyed and didn't enjoy, the benefits they were getting, and additional subjects they would like to see, left only small spaces for writing, despite this teacher's acknowledgement, in interview, of the value of extended written comment.

4.5 Administrators' work

Although other participants had some administrative responsibilities alongside their teaching, four of those I interviewed were primarily administrators. They had very different problems. For the first of these the preoccupying fact of life was large numbers of students and restricted hours of teacher time with which to meet the students' needs.

> 'Her supervisors see eye-to-eye with her and invariably agree to anything she puts forward as long as she makes a good case. They back her with resources; she has all the books that she wants and they're not checking up on her all the time. The problem is rather the shortage of time with the classes' *(Interview)*.

Although as coordinator she is not formally responsible for the instruction offered in the program, because she is interested and has considerable teaching experience she chooses to meet frequently with the teachers to talk about their classes. Her scope for improving the program is, however, severely limited:

> 'None of the four instructors are full-time -- she's the only full-time person. No one arrives or is employed before 4:30 p.m and instruction starts at 5:30 so scope is very limited and there is nothing she can do to pay people for extra hours' *(Interview)*.

As coordinator of an employment-oriented program in a community college a second participant supervises twenty-five teachers. This program seeks to teach English as a second language with a vocational emphasis. The administrator finds it a frustrating and difficult program. Attendance for the students is mandatory. After eight weeks of immersion, the mainly female Hispanic students spend five months out at a work site where they often have little opportunity to develop their English. The administrator's professional development work with the teachers, however, is rewarding and effective.

The environments in which the two New York Public Library site advisers worked offered a striking contrast with the run-down buildings and depressing circumstances with which other participants had to cope. The spaces used by staff and students were relatively well maintained, and well resourced with equipment, furniture, books and materials, and clerical support. One administrator was responsible for recruiting, teaching, and assessing students and helping them to assess themselves, and for recruiting, training and supporting volunteer teachers. She was also in charge of computer instruction and advice. She was thus not purely an administrator but had a a great deal of contact with the students, not least because everybody at her site worked in one big room. Her colleague in the Public Library coordinated staff development and general management in eight centres in three boroughs and was the specialist in learning technologies (computers and library materials).

4.6 Professional development

Between them the participants had taken a large number of potentially relevant courses at different points in their careers. Mainly these had been education courses, often in reading. Although frequently mentioned as useful, however, few courses had addressed issues specific to adults. Two universities were mentioned as offering Master's degrees in AE, but no participants had taken them: one said he could not afford the fees. None of the participants had had specific training in adult education before entering the field, beyond a brief orientation. (Preparation for one participant had been a single-day orientation course which explained the difference between adult and child education.) The sources most often cited for participants' expertise were more experienced colleagues and supervisors.

Some of the organizations supported staff development, typically in the form of practitioners' meetings within or across sites, as often as once a week. Some of the administrators of the project were responsible for organizing these (in the community college and the library). The teachers found them useful. In the view of the project team it was paradoxically the professional teachers who sometimes got the least sophisticated provision; volunteers in some organizations were better looked after.

> 'Provision was often on the single workshop model without the opportunity for extended reflection on practice, although there were exceptions to this. Most teachers in adult literacy might go to a few workshops each year. But the opportunity to work over a whole year is very unusual. Organizations don't on the whole make such investments for teachers who are generally not expected to stay in the field for very long' *(Interview, project team)*.

In addition some participants had attended open workshops run by various organizations, and the annual New York ABE Conference.

4.7 Involvement in AEDP

Applying to join AEDP had required the support of employers since participation involved release time from work. In some cases the organizations, having received the AEDP notice, had proposed to the teachers that they apply; in others the teachers had taken the initiative. In some organizations more individuals wished to participate than the employer was prepared to release. Participants' motivations for joining were varied: a concern with assessment was usually a strong factor; another was knowledge of the Institute's work and an expectation that the program would be rewarding.

> 'Although testing had just stopped in their program [the interviewee] was still concerned with general questions of assessment, and this was also the next issue on her program's agenda. She was concerned to put assessment in the hands of the students and to make it a negotiated business. The teachers felt they knew that their students were learning, but only in general terms, e.g. that they were reading more and were more critical. She wanted to be able to generate more concrete information. A particular question was "Are the students still looking at learning in a traditional way or are they internalizing our approaches?" She hoped that these issues would be looked at more rigorously in the context of a serious study group' *(Interview)*.

The interest of her colleague, who had been equally keen, had been in 'getting people to understand what they'd learned and to look ahead and be able to articulate their learning process' *(Interview)*. Another administration (the Board of Education) had also 'declared that alternative assessment was an urgent issue and were themselves starting a workshop ... [The interviewee] hoped for guidance on how to evaluate students' writing holistically' *(Interview)*. Another participant, one of two sent by the same agency, 'was already thinking about assessment because he had been to a one-day session at Lehman' *(Interview)*.

Two teachers in a community organization had seen the brochure and asked for permission to attend, motivated by a general interest in the topic. '[The interviewee] applied to gain a better idea of how to do assessment in a way that was acceptable both to her and to the students and out of a dislike for the standard assessment procedures. She was aware that she was unfamiliar with alternative forms of assessment ... ' *(Interview)*. A participant from a

different organization had applied for similar reasons, 'at a point when she was confused and worried about a new burdensome test which had been imposed on her program. She was hoping that the course would give her information about other options' *(Interview)*. Yet another had also applied on her own behalf 'out of hunger for knowledge. She was not specifically interested in assessment but had been impressed with the Lehman College team and liked the Adult Learning Center' *(Interview)*. Finally, a participant now in her follow-up year, had applied for a quite different reason: 'her site team had been broken up and scattered so that she was left teaching alone with one other person. A strong motivation for joining was to meet with colleagues' *(Interview)*.

II THE WORK OF AEDP

5 AEDP's activities

5.1 Theory and practice

AEDP existed to change practice. Thus the role in the program of *ideas*, theoretical and practical, was to inform what teachers did in their classrooms. Even, however, had the focus been centrally on theory, pedagogically it made for effective learning if participants thought about and attempted practical applications, as well as reflecting on the ideas in talk and writing. Central to teachers' participation in AEDP, therefore, were investigation and experiment at their own sites.

AEDP set out to affect the practice of, at any time, some two dozen participants who worked at widely scattered sites. To achieve this the project had at the most three staff, none of whom worked more than half-time on the project and who clearly could not work alongside the participants in their classrooms for more than an occasional few hours. The various project activities may be seen as a response to the challenge of changing or developing practice at a distance and by largely indirect means. It is a challenge faced, of course, by most forms of teacher training. AEDP's solutions, however, were innovative, certainly when seen against teacher education in general, though some had previously been used in projects within the Institute for Literacy Studies.

The traditional teacher training model is to impart ideas in an academic setting and trust that they will subsequently inform practice. AEDP, in contrast, employed various strategies specifically to address the transfer of ideas from academic to program settings. Perhaps the most basic of these was to bring

the teachers' own practice into the seminar as content for examination: the efficacy of the team's theoretical framework was then demonstrated less by exposition than by the light it threw on the teachers' experience and students' work.

The basic elements of the experience provided by AEDP will now be described, with some evaluative comment gathered from participants.

5.2 The seminar

For this section I draw both on participants' accounts and on my observation of parts of two first-year seminars of the 1991 intake group and one follow-up seminar of the 1990 intake group.

Seminars at the Institute for Literacy Studies in Lehman College were the occasions when the group met and were thus the central element of both first-year and follow-up activities with each group. They were generally held on weekdays, twice a month with the first year group, with three additional Saturdays, and monthly, with some Saturdays, in the follow-up year. The seminars fulfilled a variety of functions which the organizational forms reflected. The latter included whole group meetings (presentations, discussions, exercises); small group meetings (regular groups of constant membership, focused on sharing journal writing, and special groups constructed around research interests once individual projects had got under way); and one-to-one consultations between a team member and a participant.

The two first-year seminars which I observed in part were structured as follows:

> 'This session was mainly about interviewing as a technique of alternative assessment. The plan was first to discuss the business of interviewing in general (this was going on when I arrived), secondly to generate a list of questions for interviewing each other, thirdly to categorize those into groups, fourthly to do interviews and fifthly to reflect on the experience and consider implications for interviewing the students. Time ran out before the last could be accomplished. Near the end of the session, a homework was set, to conduct an interview with a student and write it up. Participants were to bring five copies of the transcript to the next session. An article was also distributed to be read for the next session' *(Seminar observation, November).*
>
> 'Karen had explained holistic scoring of writing [in the context of a discussion of direct and indirect measures of writing]. There was

> discussion of the grading by specified characteristics (rather than by a 'sense of a grade or level'). Discussion of the research projects followed. The seminar was to continue the next day (Saturday), with discussion of Linda Brodkey's article 'The Literacy Letters', and with presentations by two participants about the data they were collecting' *(Seminar observation, April).*

The functions which the seminar served could be summarised as follows: bringing together teachers from different organizational and institutional contexts; demonstration of techniques of teaching, assessment or research; consultation between team members and individuals about journals or research projects; reviewing work done individually since last meeting, and plans for the next stage; and discussion of articles read. Thus a great deal went on in the seminars -- more, in the project's view, than could be taken in and evaluated at the time. Consistently with their general emphasis on the power of written records as a means of later learning, the team accordingly required participants to take full notes. These were reflected on subsequently in writing, normally on a side of the page which had been left blank for the purpose.

Learning from others. The format of the seminar was designed to maximise interaction. As well as the use of a variety of meeting formats, as mentioned above, lunch was planned as a pleasant social occasion: the group stayed together in the seminar room and shared food which they had brought. Participants frequently stated in interview how they valued the chance to meet practitioners from other sites. Outside AEDP there were few other opportunities for interchange with teachers doing related work in other organizations. There were three principal benefits. First, the teachers acquired a sense of the scope of the work of their own profession and of the range of contexts in which it occurred. Since Adult Education is undeveloped as a profession, raising standards is seen by AEDP as in part a matter of building a professional community with a sense of identity, a body of professional knowledge and a research tradition. Bringing teachers together from different organizations and types of institutions was seen by both team and participants as an important step. Second, participants learned about teaching and assessment ideas employed by colleagues at different sites, and, third, they helped each other in tackling the new ideas and techniques which AEDP presented to them.

Learning was found by participants to result not only from exposure to new ideas but also from the need, which arose from the diversity of the group, to articulate and justify one's own taken-for-granted assumptions:

> 'All have similar experiences. But there is a variety of views, some of them more traditional, though these are expressed without conflict. This is healthy because when someone has a different viewpoint, one has to formulate one's own ideas more sharply, and back them up. Some find the sessions more exciting and meaningful than others because of different starting points and openness to ideas. The richest aspect of the seminars has been that people have stimulated each other. All get ideas from others' discoveries' *(Interview)*.

The benefits of collaborative learning could be experienced in both large and small groups. An instance of learning in the full group was described by one teacher:

> '[One of the participants] read a piece from a student whose mother died when she was young -- very powerful and simple. Everyone in the room said something about it and it was amazing what was learned about the text. It illustrated the fruitfulness of looking in the first place not for error but strength' *(Interview)*.

The same episode was referred to also, in similarly positive terms, by another teacher, one who was generally not uncritical of the project. She acknowledged that

> 'in examining pieces of writing she tends to emphasise their shortcomings and doesn't sufficiently stress their positive aspects. The first time the latter approach was practised with Debbie in the seminar it came out so differently; she had to sit and rethink' *(Interview)*.

While observing a group discussing their research projects I noted

> 'The writing group I'm with accepts a suggestion from one of them that they help each other with coding their data, and a proposal from another that they take one data sample and code it together. They proceed to do this' *(Seminar observation)*.

The second teacher leads the coding exercise. As a specialist in business education who felt generally isolated from the educational mainstream, she was gratified that her expertise was found useful by others. She was able to share what she had learned about analysing and coding data, first in this small group and on the following day in the full seminar.

Imparting techniques. Considerable seminar time was devoted to the teaching of techniques, for teaching, assessment and research. Extensive

preparation was given, for instance, for the research projects: at the time of the April interviews the team had, according to a participant, showed participants ways of working with data, finding themes and issues, and developing questions. Earlier (as reported above) I had seen an extended introduction of techniques and issues relating to interviewing.

Review of assigned activities. Between seminar meetings participants were expected to engage in various activities, some on a regular basis (reading, writing a journal), others for a specific purpose to do with a current topic. At a seminar, for instance, I noted:

> 'Near the end of the session, a homework was set to conduct an interview with a student and write it up. Participants were to bring five copies to the next session. There was also an article to be read' *(Seminar observation).*

Time in the seminars was regularly given for reviewing work done at the sites since the last meeting. For example, in the follow-up seminar which I attended

> 'two participants were asked to share some data they'd brought. [One teacher] read out her observation notes about a socially tense situation that had arisen between some members of her class. A useful discussion followed in which Lena pointed out that it was [the teacher's] engagement in this writing that had caused her to see the issue of whether a particular student was jealous. Without the writing this awareness would not have arisen' *(Seminar observation).*

Discussion of articles read. In accordance with AEDP's general belief that learning was enhanced by deliberate engagement in reflective practices, assigned readings were gone over both in the participants' journals and (where time allowed) in class. On one of my interviewing visits on a Monday, three participants were still actively reassessing a discussion which had taken place in the previous Saturday's seminar of a paper by Linda Brodky. The group had been divided in their response to the article (the divisions centering around whether the racism which the author had set out to overcome in her class had in fact persisted in her own attitudes).

The conduct of the seminars. The team sought in the seminars to follow the same procedural principles which they advocated that participants use with their students. These principles included a democratic receptiveness to learners' wishes and concerns; and the pedagogical principles that teaching be based on adequate knowledge of the learners' conceptions and that learners

have extensive opportunity to process new ideas in their own language, in writing and discussion. The seminar discourse was thus highly interactive, with only brief stretches of monologue by team members. (An occasion when Karen gave a talk about holistic assessment [Seminar of 10 April] was noted by one participant as unusual.) Maintaining this approach could involve tensions, as when participants had a view of teaching in which the authoritative delivery of expertise figured more prominently, or simply preferred to be told more, and when the prior knowledge and 'processing needs' of participants varied widely. This was particularly the case in the first year of the project.

It was clear that the nature of the first group, recruited without the benefit of interviews and arriving in some cases with false expectations, had made the 1989-90 seminar a difficult experience for the team. The participant's comment, quoted above, on the exchange of diverse views without conflict, would not have been made by the first AEDP participants, who experienced considerable conflict, ascribed variously in the interviews to 'political activists', to incompatible personalities and to underlying class and race tensions. In comparison with teachers in mainstream education, adult literacy/ESOL education does appear to contain a higher proportion of individuals who see themselves as marginal to the institutions, who have entered the field out of a passionate sense of justice and who have hitherto worked mainly in freelance and non-bureaucratised types of jobs where collegial discussion on the seminar model is not a routine experience. At all events, according to a participant who had continued into the second year,

> 'There was a wide and wild range of participants. Some of them had far-out ideas about the instruction of adults, referring to them in terms like "those people". It was a bizarre group. After the initial meetings when four or five dropped out and the group reduced to about twelve it was a lot calmer but still got quite heated because there were very different perspectives. The second year was more enjoyable, with four or five people only' *(Interview)*.

The team's procedural assumption that the project was a collaborative exploration did not initially prove a viable basis for getting such a diverse and conflict-ridden group to function effectively. With benefit of hindsight, another teacher who participated for the full two years said it had been a strategic mistake by the team to operate so democratically, by discussion rather than by giving information:

> 'In [the interviewee's] view, the team had been too kind. They had wanted it to be collaborative but the group didn't know enough to collaborate effectively. They had needed a lot of information first but

> instead there was a lot of abstract discussion. It had been very up in the air. It had also provided a soap box for political activists. When these people dropped out, [this teacher] had stuck to it, though doubtful about its value. By mid-way, however, the community building process had worked and it had become good. They had started working on projects. There were concrete issues at stake. They learned more from each other and the facilitators also gave more information' *(Interview)*.

The teacher quoted previously had also observed that the first year course had been 'a bit touchy-feely or amorphous. She had wanted to dive into the issues. She acknowledged, however, that this was not to say she would have been capable of doing so' *(Interview)*.

That participant's opinion that what was needed by the first group was more information is not the only possible view. It could be argued that teachers working in adult literacy/ESOL already had the necessary knowledge, or that it could be gained in their own classrooms by observation and reflection. AEDP was essentially about bringing different insights and perspectives to bear on knowledge and experience that were already shared. These could not be imparted by an authoritative lecturer but had to be constructed by the participants themselves through reflection and discussion, albeit with instigation from ideas and opinions that might be presented in more traditional pedagogical modes.

The 1990 and 1991 sessions began with carefully selected groups which proved more harmonious. The individuals I spoke to had enjoyed their first year far more than had the original cohort, and found the seminar a stimulating and rewarding experience. In addition, the team avoided strategies which had been less successful the previous year. Dissatisfactions with the management of the seminar were minor, such as one teacher's view that the use of time could have been tighter. (Though she acknowledged it was hard for the leaders to be highly prescriptive with participants who were really their peers, she felt that exercises in the whole group sometimes took too long. 'Time has a different value when (for a Saturday) one has to make complicated baby-sitting arrangements' -- *Interview*.)

In general the seminars were highly valued by participants and met several of their most urgent needs: for meeting colleagues from different sites, for sustained examination of their practice and for exposure to and communal reflection on ideas from sources outside the city (particularly through articles). Allowing teachers to meet on a regular basis for extended

discussion, organized and informal, was perhaps what participants valued the most about AEDP.

The informality and collegiality of the management of the seminars made them enjoyable and minimised for less experienced participants any anxieties about contributing to discussion in a large group. Though the approach was at times difficult to handle, it is hard to imagine how a more prescriptive or tightly scheduled approach could have achieved the same ends.

There may be room, however, for some tactical concessions to conventional expectations in the early weeks with a group. The team were right in principle to resist pressure to collude with some participants' demands for a heavy loading of information. Conscious thought does, however, need to be given to overcoming participants' early anxieties about whether their investment of time and energy will be worthwhile. Helpful strategies might include demonstrating at the start that significant work existed in alternative assessment and that participants would become familiar with it, and, second, creating a sense of businesslike briskness in the proceedings.

5.3 Research projects

In both the first and the follow-up year participants were required to conduct a research project and write a paper. The research project was to be an investigation into an assessment practice they had experimentally introduced. Titles of reports which I read were: 'Writing Assessment in a Multi-Level Class', 'Oral History Project', 'A Study of the Attitudes and Beliefs of Literacy Students', 'Using Alternative Assessment Methods during Student Centered Instructional Projects', 'Self-Assessment as a Dialogue between Student and Teacher', and 'Writing Process as Assessment/Evaluation'.

The initiation of the projects was preceded by ample discussion in the seminars and supported by readings on qualitative research, sheets of guidelines, small group discussion, one-on-one consultations and a series of advisory and compulsory deadlines.

Participants in the current first-year group discussed their research projects in small groups based on shared areas of interest, namely: writing assessment (portfolios and related approaches); reading (reading/writing connections, reading strategies); documentation for influencing policy; tutor support issues; changes in attitudes and beliefs: literacy use in the community *(Seminar observation)*.

The 1991 intake participants who were in my sample had all found topics which enabled them to satisfy some concern or curiosity about their teaching and their students. One teacher, for instance, 'had wanted to study at the same time the two changes that interested her in her class: in self-attitude and in writing. She was studying how the first was reflected in the second' *(Interview)*. Participants who had completed projects in earlier years testified to their value (though not all had found equal value in first and follow-up year projects). A typical note in my interview records reads, for instance: 'Her second year project had been very important to [the interviewee]. It was a study of students using micro-computers in groups; she had been concerned to find what they got out of it' *(Interview)*. For a number of teachers it was starting the research project that made AEDP come together to make sense for the first time (see below, p.35).

An example of the supporting documentation was a set of Report Guidelines posing questions which research project reports should address. The questions were about the issues that had given rise to the inquiry, the process of developing a research procedure, the means of involving students and fellow AEDP participants, piloting, what was learned, and what would be done differently another time or on a larger scale.

What participants learned from the research project appeared to be heavily affected by the quality of their one-on-one communication with the team about it. Indeed, a major value of the research project was as a vehicle for effective individual teaching. I observed an impressive instance during the individual conferences at the follow-up seminar I attended. In the course of the consultation one of the team (Deborah) was able to show the participant that the project could be a means by which he might address the teaching or assessment problems currently concerning him:

> 'You have questions, then study them in your classroom. Frame questions like "How does this style of teaching affect my students? How does it affect me?". It's like taping a gig. [The participant had been a jazz musician.] You go back to the piano and you say "What did I actually do there? Why did that work so well?". Like a science experiment -- you hold off on your judgement for a couple more steps.'

Deborah showed how to frame a research topic which would allow the teacher to study the one student he was particularly intrigued by, at the same time as addressing the main area in which his classroom practice needed strengthening, that of group management; and finally she got him to see the necessity of

exhaustive written recording and the dangers of unrealistically taping more material than there would ever be time to analyse *(Seminar observation)*.

Some participants saw value beyond their own learning in undertaking the research project.

> '[The interviewee] was interested in the issue [portfolio assessment] in itself, but also, because the Board of Education was going to produce a policy of portfolio assessment, she wanted to have an input on this before it solidified. She therefore needed to argue in committees and felt that doing some research into the issue would give her something solid to talk about' *(Seminar observation)*.

The team's belief was that 'writing a research paper had value not because competence in the particular written genre was important but as a means of acquiring a way of thinking that would then be taken into teaching' *(Interview, project team)*. Not all participants, however, were convinced. 'The writing of the first year project wasn't an important part of it -- doing the project was the important thing' *(Interview)*. The general view was, however, that AEDP had enabled teachers to realise the power of writing as a means of gaining insight.

It seemed to be harder for some administrators than for other participants to fit the research project model to their situation. One said, for instance, that 'she experienced the project as something of a distraction from her broad purpose of understanding mass placement; she had had to choose a narrower topic for the sake of manageability' *(Interview)*. Another had found a satisfying focus only for the follow-up year project.

The heavy investment placed by the team in the research project proved generally justified. The project was a valued learning experience that many participants believed resulted in permanent gains in skill and understanding. It was a vehicle through which AEDP's ideas were operationalised and given substance by the teachers within their own contexts. The team were especially skillful and effective in supporting the projects.

5.4 Site visits

According to the team,

> 'site visits by team members had not been made in the first year [although participants had formed research project groups which met in their own localities: these had been visited twice]. In the current year

> each participant was visited twice and possibly three times. The functions of the visit were to get to know the participants, to help them with the research project and to provide practical support (such as taking notes during the course of an activity). Even though the quantity of the support was nominal, isolated teachers found it valuable and the journals constantly referred to the helpfulness of the visits. Also, the visits bridged the long time gaps between the project's meetings' *(Interview, project team)*.

All the participants who spoke about the visits confirmed that they had found them helpful, though one participant in the 1990 intake said that not all teachers in her group had welcomed the visits. She herself named feedback from Lena about her teaching as particularly helpful. Another said she 'had had useful ideas from Debbie on assessment, teaching, organization and her research project, and that it had been good for her students to see someone from where she goes when she leaves them on some Fridays' *(Interview)*. After a visit from Debbie during which 'they had dissected one person's portfolio together', a third teacher had been asked to write about the visit in her journal and had found the writing 'empowered her and was dynamic' *(Interview)*. A fourth had been visited by all three of the team and had gained insights which he was able to put to immediate practical use *(Interview)*.

Participants felt that site visits provided significant help. They are particularly useful as a means of helping teachers reinterpret their own classrooms in terms of the project's general ideas.

5.5 Reading

Copies of one or more articles were given out at the end of most seminars, for reading before the next meeting. Participants were expected to write reflective journal entries on aspects they found particularly relevant. In the interviews specific readings were often mentioned as memorable, useful or illuminating: these included chapters from Elsa Auerbach's *Making Meaning, Making Change* and Denny Taylor's and Catherine Dorsey-Gaines's *Growing Up Literate*. Linda Brodky's 'The Literacy Letters' was mentioned by several participants offering different evaluations: according to one teacher 'some had been so incensed they had wanted to write to the author, though [this teacher] had not herself felt this way' *(Interview)*. An article which spelled out the literacy practices engaged in by people in depressed areas of cities, and which attacked the misconception that people in such places don't read, was taken by some participants as something of a revelation *(Interviews)*, and by one (claiming to express the feeling in the group) as a condescending explanation of what any serious adult educator took for granted. This participant had

found 'the articles early on (in the 1990-91 program) too vague. Last year everyone attacked the articles' *(Interview)*. This was clearly one manifestation of the difficulty the team faced in catering for a group which included such a range of experience and knowledge. A participant who wanted AEDP to be more academic lamented (alone among my informants) that the readings were 'truncated and decontextualised; one did not know anything about the authors and what else they had done' *(Interview)*.

The typical reaction to the readings, however, was that they had generally been helpful. In a discussion I attended on an article about qualitative data a teacher said that reading this had made her notice and make a record of the jealous behaviour of her student Doris (see p.24) *(Seminar observation)*. Another specific result of an identified reading was one teacher's reported new practice of 'monitoring her own talk to avoid judgemental terms. She had been made aware of the need for this by a reference in a reading to a student who was asked "What helped you most?", and replied "The way you talked"' *(Interview)*. Another participant 'intended to use the article 'Collage of Portfolios' as a model for writing up her research project' *(Interview)*.

No set of readings will entirely suit every teacher, especially when controversial items are included. The selections worked well to raise awareness of issues, stimulate thinking and discussion, and provide knowledge of practice elsewhere.

There would have been no harm, and something to be gained, in the team's sharing with participants, through handouts, more of their own contextual understandings of the domains from which the articles were drawn. Information could, for instance, have been provided about the nature of the journals and books the items appeared in, the backgrounds and other work of the authors, the range and scope of other articles about the topics, and bibliographic sources available. Such a move might have been an easy way to help assuage some participants' anxieties about the lack of an information base. Serious reading, beyond the sources given, is in any case part of the professional culture which projects like AEDP seek to create.

5.6 Journals

Not all participants fully accepted the need to write prolifically or were convinced of its value. One administrator said she got no time to write. 'There was perhaps too much writing. There needs to be more care given to people who do not thrive on writing but who may like simply to talk and listen. Those are valid ways of learning' *(Interview)*. Another said that in her

first year she had not used the journal as she was meant to, but came to value writing in the follow-up year. The team's position, that writing could make a crucial difference to the scope and quality of reflection about teaching, seminars and texts, could perhaps only be appreciated by those who were prepared to do enough writing of the appropriate type to experience these benefits.

Most participants, even if writing had not yet worked this way for them, worked hard at their journals in the expectation that the team's beliefs would prove well-founded. They either enjoyed writing the journal ('[The interviewee] loved writing the journal and getting responses' -- *Interview*) or were persuaded of its value and were disciplining themselves to do it. If the journal's reflective function was still not fully appreciated, most had discovered its value as a record which enabled one to recall what would otherwise have been forgotten, to realise the progress one had made and to notice what one had got out of an experience that at the time had seemed insignificant. During a seminar I saw teachers reading extracts from their journals to the group, a process evidently considered valuable by those present. One reader was asked for a copy of a list she had created in one of her entries (see below, 5.8). Some participants, though not the majority, volunteered a rationale close to that which a member of the team formulated in these terms:

> 'There is an initial problem for participants of getting clear about what all the different elements have to do with each other. Helping to overcome this is partly the purpose of the journal' *(Interview, project team)*.

The rest still saw the journal as primarily an aspect of documentation.

For reflection and deliberation, not everyone's cognitive style is best served by writing. But it could help more teachers than currently know how to use it. Moreover, if teachers are to adopt a researcher stance towards their work they need techniques of written documentation. The team were right to place the emphasis they did on participants' writing and were successful in convincing a high proportion of participants of the value of writing for their own work.

5.7 The balance of activities in AEDP

The combination of meetings, research projects, site visits, reading and writing was one of the distinctive contributions of AEDP and worked well,

enabling elements to reinforce each other and ideas to be the more securely understood through being handled in a number of media and contexts. It also helped to ensure that theory and practice informed each other.

5.8 The follow-up year

There was agreement among the three participants I spoke to from the first (1989) intake that the follow-up year had been more rewarding and enjoyable than the first year. (Because of illness one of the three had attended only the early follow-up sessions.) A reason cited was that the most argumentative and least committed people had dropped out; another was that the group had been smaller. A suggestion that, since the really important work was done in the second year, a first year January start would give sufficient lead-in time, presumably reflected that participant's memories of the troubled first few months of the 1989 session. This person said that by the follow-up year she had learned to use writing quite differently and thus found her involvement more productive. She had found her second year research project interesting to write and had learned a lot in doing it. Her colleague confirmed that her second year project, a study of students using micro-computers in groups, had been very important to her, unlike the one she had done in the first year.

Of the next year's participants (the 1990 intake, constituting the current follow-up group) all confirmed the value of the second year, a judgement which was not coloured, like that of the first group, by a sense of sharp contrast with an unhappy first half-year. The main positively appreciated factor was small group size. One of the less confident and experienced participants said 'she appreciated the smaller group and more relaxed atmosphere and did not feel as apprehensive this year' *(Interview)*. Another (who was alone in this) disagreed: 'the best thing about AEDP was the chance to dialogue informally with colleagues; the second year group is less rewarding because it's smaller' *(Interview)*. Otherwise, the only regret was at the infrequency of the meetings, which are held once a month and on two Saturdays: 'the program loses intensity; [the interviewee] tends not to think about the program until a few days before. The frequency of first year meetings was fine' *(Interview)*.

Some members of the 1991 intake expressed regret that there would be no follow-up year for them. (Since these interviews it has fortunately proved possible after all to provide a second year program for this group.)

As in the first year, the seminar was the core of the follow-up year's activity. The pattern of the one I observed (on 1 February) was as follows. Participants

arrived in the lounge and went into individual or paired consultations with team members. These lasted a full hour and a half; the meeting I sat in on (between Debbie and an individual participant), and, it appeared, the others also, were intense working sessions around the planning and execution of the research project (see above, 5.3). The full group then met and exchanged oral accounts of their current projects. The teacher working with Debbie told the group about useful advice he had just received from her. A great deal of discussion was generated. Lunch, taken in the lounge, occupied half an hour. One participant was invited by the team to read out some reflective writing. It was about the difficulty of combining observation with participation and the responsibility to be available for help and to keep the class going. Another member (as reported above) asked for a copy of this person's list of things that she might look for when observing. After a brief discussion of the scheduling of future meetings Debbie guided the group in a consideration of an article about qualitative data which they had read since last time. The day ended with advice on target dates for completing stages of the project, and the handing out of readings for the next session.

Participants who took part in the follow-up seminar were unanimous as to its value. In part the smaller group size was a factor, but in addition, after a full year's work and a completed research project, teachers were at this stage in a position to achieve maximum benefit from working together.

6 The effects of AEDP on participants

6.1 Participants' experiences of AEDP

Coming to grips with new ideas. Participants (not only from the first group) frequently reported a sense of confusion and loss of bearings during the early months of their involvement in AEDP. They had found it hard to grasp what the project was essentially about. In the earlier (November) set of interviews, some of the final (1991) group expressed a sense of disorientation: '[The interviewee] was somewhat confused after the first two sessions but now, after the third, says she sees where the program is going.' 'The initial ideas promoted were not too clear to her [a different participant] ... It's still early days and she doesn't feel she's got a handle on things yet' *(Interviews)*. Looking back from later in the year and subsequent years, participants tended to see their own initial confusion as inevitable given their state of understanding at the time; it had not been caused by lack of clarity on the

team's part. 'The project, at first, seemed rather directionless but this was due to the inexperience and lack of understanding of the participants. The team were actually telling you things but you didn't understand them' *(Interview)*. One teacher spoke of her own and a colleague's experience of the ideas falling into place and making sense after the first few sessions:

> 'At first, there seemed to be nothing to bite into. The groups were used to cookbook approaches and weren't getting them. A turning point which she recalled was when [a colleague] suddenly said, in about January, "I get it. It's about making assessment part of teaching." That was a significant moment. [The interviewee] thought she herself had caught on a bit before that' *(Interview)*.

What helped to bring the project into focus and to provide participants with new excitement in learning was the institution of empirical inquiry at their sites: 'In spring it all got more relevant. It may have been that they had moved on to different types of article ... But also they started gathering data themselves and seeing progress in students' *(Interview)*. Others too reported on the difference that starting the projects had made.

Many participants communicated to me, asked or unasked, their understandings of the key ideas they had acquired. Both the current year participants who provided comment in April, and members of the earlier groups, expressed these ideas in generally consistent terms that were in tune with the team's stated intentions. In the participants' formulations some of these ideas were:

- encouraging teachers to build in an extensive knowledge of their students in such a way as to inform the curriculum.
- A teacher 'should also realize the extensive skills and experiences and networks, and the general background knowledge, that students bring with them that's usable' *(Interview)*.
- AEDP 'promotes team exploration of ways to help students evaluate themselves and to develop non-threatening, encouraging, and useful forms of assessment which might eventually displace the more disruptive forms of evaluation that are presently used' *(Interview)*.

Overall evaluation by participants. Specific comments offered by participants on AEDP as a whole were as follows:

- 'She didn't know when she applied that it was going to be this good. It's more than fulfilling expectations' *(Interview)*.

- 'She had no suggestions for improvements' *(Interview)*.
- 'Feels satisfaction with the understanding she's achieved, though less with the paperwork (project and journal) because she has not found time to do them properly' *(Interview)*.
- The project [she was now in the follow-up year] 'had been an epiphany with the readings and the theory. Things from her life had come together in this' *(Interview)*.

Implicit in almost all the testimony were a basic approval and appreciation of what AEDP was doing. This is equally true of those who were most forthcoming with criticisms, and it is against that background that the criticisms must be seen. About the team's management style, one participant expressed the general view when she said that 'the AEDP team were warm, encouraging, humorous and down-to-earth, and not threatening; one felt they were open to interaction' *(Interview)*. Similarly: 'The leaders are dynamic and good at research' *(Interview)*. A third teacher said he 'needs a broader view and sees it in the way the team work. They operate an effective apprenticeship model, and he's drawn to them: the three are very supportive, in different ways' *(Interview)*.

As against the general satisfaction with the project, the criticisms may be quickly indicated. All were, as far as I could tell, minority opinions of one or a few individuals, and did not represent the feeling in the group as a whole. Dissatisfactions concerned the first year of AEDP and (often in relation to that year) the balance of information-giving with discussion and activity, and of more democratic with more directive management of the seminar. One 1989 participant made a recommendation: 'The team should not hold back from presenting a considerable amount of information at the start of the program. The intention to build up to a collaborative professional relationship is worthy but people do need information to work on first. So there should be presentations, experts should be brought in and the loosening up should be a gradual process' *(Interview)*. As mentioned above (5.2), the view that information was what was needed is perhaps open to challenge.

That the team responded in good time to the problems in the initial year is affirmed by more than one participant:

> 'After the first meetings, the team sensed the diversity in the group and switched to more explicit discussions of what alternative assessment meant, whole language, the writing process and theories of reading. They gave a lot of readings in terms of articles. They discussed ways of doing research' *(Interview)*.

The lack of similar critical comment from members of the 1990 and 1991 intakes indicates that in those years the team was felt to have got the balance right.

Another respect (not altogether distinct) in which some fault was found with the program was the balance of the theoretical or academic with the practical. The view was expressed (in relation to the 1990-91 program) that more 'theory' was needed, by which the participant meant that underlying concepts, the team's and the participants', should be explicitly formulated for critical discussion; this was seen as a means of addressing the diversity of assumptions and presuppositions which new groups brought with them:

> 'There could be more theory and there was not enough time spent talking about the theory. The very different assumptions of the participants on intake needed to be teased out early so the people understood what they were looking at. The project was successful for [this informant] because she was already sympathetic to the AEDP philosophy. For others, the adjustment was difficult. Programs with diverse intake are an advantage and so are different ideas but people need to be self-conscious about them' *(Interview)*.

In fact the team believe they included a considerable amount of theory, although not through discrete formal presentations.

An obvious point of comparison with the AEDP program was conventional academic courses, and comment was offered on what the relationship should be. Not all this comment was consistent. One participant, referring in November to a university course she had taken which had been appropriately theoretical for the academic context, felt that the AEDP project should in comparison remain practically-oriented. The following April, however, she was suggesting that 'something a bit more like an academic course, with more formal teaching -- a balance,' would have been better. Another participant, however, felt that AEDP would, as it stood, make a good basis for a Masters program in Adult Education.

A criticism voiced in only one interview was that AEDP was unrealistic about the practices that AE teachers could be expected to implement.

> '[The interviewee's] main criticism of the project was that things which are desirable will not be done unless they're realistic. You have to deal with the population -- with the teachers as they are, not as they should be. Her colleagues work thirty hours without preparation time and have to do other jobs in order to live. A suggestion of typing up

> interviews is therefore quite unrealistic. That's an example. Nobody could do fifteen interviews in September and type them up. Even if she modelled this sort of conscious behaviour, her colleagues wouldn't assimilate it. The team should be asking the question, 'What can we do that is confined to class time or that won't take extra time'? At meetings which she's attended, any ideas that involve more time are simply dismissed. One colleague became hysterical at the mere mention of portfolios' *(Interview)*.

Personal development of the participants. Successful professional development is often experienced as personal development. This happened in AEDP. Sometimes it had to do with the occurrence of AEDP at a particular juncture in a person's biography and career, perhaps when feeling stale after years in the same job. A general sense of revitalisation could then occur: 'the project is bringing me back to life' *(Interview)*.

Some experienced the development of their writing abilities as an enhancement that went beyond the immediate context of teaching and assessment. One teacher spoke of learning through AEDP to organise writing more tightly because of the greater awareness she had gained of structure and classification *(Interview)*. Another 'now does more writing of her own. She likes writing to reflect on articles -- writing "think-pieces". She also writes now while the students are writing. That's a change' *(Interview)*.

Administrators' experience of AEDP. Although the team had had doubts about the desirability of including administrators in the project, on the grounds that their presence might be inhibiting to teachers, a number had been and were involved and I detected no inhibiting effect. One of the administrators felt that 'the administrator-teacher mix was actually very good' *(Interview)*, but I did not collect teachers' views on the matter. It was one of the administrators, working for an organization in which the use of the TABE was mandatory, who most obviously illustrated the achievement of one of the project's purposes, 'to get the participants to look critically at the practices that their programs were telling them to engage in. The project provided a neutral ground on which they could look at the official instructions that they were having to cope with' *(Interview)*.

A problem for the project in including administrators was that their needs and interests were somewhat different from those of the teachers. The administrator just quoted felt that the conception of the research project in the 1989-90 year was too teacher-oriented for her needs, though this was rectified

in the follow-up year: 'She thought that in the second year the team did respond adequately to her different situation as an administrator and not a teacher' *(Interview)*. An administrator in the current (1991) intake was in no doubt that what she had learned from AEDP was directly useful in her work, since this was very much about assessment: see below, 6.4.

Participants were overwhelmingly approving of AEDP. They enjoyed their involvement and thought they learned a great deal from it. They appreciated the team's seriousness, expertise and respect for what the teachers brought with them, and the climate of open interaction which was created. Some had conspicuously acquired new professional skills, beyond the usual classroom ones, such as writing and systematic inquiry.

Administrators' needs were somewhat different but it seemed that these could be successfully accommodated within a group basically consisting of teachers, and that there were advantages in their participation.

In relation to participants' overall approval of AEDP, criticisms were minor. Some dissatisfactions concerned the amount of what was variously referred to as 'information' and 'theory'. But participants were confused on this point, perhaps indicating a need for some explicit discussion of what 'theory' is: the respects, for instance, in which it can be given and those in which it can be grasped only through active engagement with problems, and the fact that it may be manifested not only in formal exposition but in the treatment of substantive issues and experiences.

6.2 Effects on teachers' practice

The most obvious indicator of the effectiveness of AEDP would be changes in participants' practice. A limitation of an evaluation that depends mainly on interviews with participants and examination of documents is that it gains little direct evidence of changes in practice. Indirect evidence, however, is in this case available and useful. It comes most frequently from interviews, but also from journals and research projects.

The apparent simplicity of the criterion of 'changed practice' in evaluating a project such as AEDP is, however, misleading. For instance, procedures advocated by the project might indeed have been implemented, but in a mechanical manner; for an adaptive use of AEDP ideas within the changing situations of teaching, an understanding of principle is required. What is at issue is thus not simply changes introduced but improved capability to make appropriate change. A related consideration is that procedures endorsed by

AEDP might already be being practised by a teacher, but simply as self-devised or unsystematically acquired pragmatic solutions to immediate problems. The same practices are likely to be deployed more effectively, confidently and adaptively (and to be disseminated to colleagues) if they are grounded in a worked-out system of ideas. Thus one participant, according to the team, was referred to as 'having been given permission by the project to go on and do the things that she had been doing instinctively. It had confirmed her intuitive knowledge and made it more legitimate' *(Interview, project team)*. (Such cases are, however, sometimes difficult to distinguish from those in which participants *look for* confirmation for their own habitual practices and fail to note ways in which these are contradicted by the principles established in AEDP. Such may have been the case with the teacher who said 'it was good to have endorsement as a good approach for something that you've been doing for a long time perhaps instinctively' -- *Interview.*)

A number of teachers when asked were able to list the ways in which their thinking and practice had changed:

> 'A closer attention to the individual, sharpening of self-consciousness, developing the discipline of writing things down, encouragement of reflectiveness' *(Interview)*.

> 'Noticing what students are and aren't doing; realising the importance of student involvement and ownership; realising the value of discussions, and awareness of the need to develop skills of managing discussion; and realising that with support most individuals are able to work out their problems: the task is to open the way for them' *(Interview)*.

> 'More open to students; less formal and reserved (students now use her first name); more alert to what students say: picks up on it; monitors her own talk to avoid judgemental terms; more observant of the way students behave; more involved in who they are as individuals; uses students as a resource; involves them in self-assessment; individualised approach to spelling and vocabulary; generally, has cleared up in her mind how to get students involved' *(Interview)*.

Understanding and adoption of alternative assessment. Perhaps the most important understanding gained in the area of assessment was that the process could not be precise or mechanical:

> 'Since experts do not have answers (even in the diagnosis of physiologically-based problems), trial and error approaches are necessary. The building of sensitivity and awareness is appropriate training in assessment, so that teachers become better at explaining and more sensitive to issues and clues. Training of teachers therefore can only be through fostering awareness and sensitivity, and cannot be through learning 10 things to do, a how-to manual' *(Interview)*.

This teacher had learned to see her own notemaking in class as an assessment activity. Part of what was implied in that view was 'a different relationship with the students in which they and the teacher are co-investigators and co-planners'. The documentation and analysis become a shared attempt to understand.

Another participant had learned consciously to value, in the context of assessment, what she learned when 'her students from Cuba and the Caribbean tell her all about a building they remember, the school they went to and so on. This is all very helpful.' It seems to have been AEDP that introduced her to the possibility of systematically seeking such data through interviews -- a practice which, as an administrator, she is able to introduce across her site *(Interview)*.

It is possible, however, that some participants incorporated interviewing and forms of self-evaluation simply as technical strategies, without understanding or accepting the basic idea of teacher and student together arriving at an adequate rounded picture. A possible indicator of this failure was the worry expressed by one 1991 intake teacher early in the program about possible 'bias' introduced by the interview process and the difficulty of obtaining 'objective' information: 'How do you measure the results of an interview?' *(Interview)*.

A number of participants had instituted procedures whereby students could assess their own progress. Some sounded rather routine in nature, such as a 'sheet which she requires the students to complete daily in which they say how well they've done, what they've done, how they feel -- just a sentence -- and also for each reading selection, students make an assessment on interest, main idea and comment' *(Interview)*. This teacher's later (April) report of what she had been doing, however, suggested that her approach to self-assessment had been more radical: she claimed she had been

> 'able to move from a whole-class to an individualised mode of learning in math because the students had been put in charge of monitoring and recording their own progress. As a result students feel more

> accountable and less dependent, and [the teacher] believes this has contributed to their current sense of achievement in this subject' *(Interview)*.

At a local level self-evaluation might simply be a matter of encouraging students' explicit awareness of their own strategies: one teacher asks, for instance, 'How do you know that word?' *(Interview)*.

Teaching: more specific effects. One teacher insisted that she still maintained certain practices which she felt that the team disapproved of: 'recognizing phonic patterns is helpful.' In fact, the team believe this too but want participants to have a sense of the relative importance of this skill in the whole of reading practice. This teacher went on, however, to acknowledge that 'she also uses techniques offered here such as reading journals and journals in general' *(Interview)*. A second teacher, speaking of an exercise she had used before (writing a biographical sketch), explained that 'This time she has approached it differently, and attributes the difference explicitly to what she has learned from AEDP. She has talked more with the students, observed more, documented more, and given more help. The work has been more individualised and more relevant' *(Interview)*.

Practice related to *writing* had been affected, according to the testimony, in a number of ways. The dialogue journal had, according to the testimony, been adopted in a number of classes. A teacher from the current group had this year 'used more writing than ever before' *(Interview)*. Another, who had been made very conscious of the value of writing for students and had made it a central part of her program, was pleased that after some months students were developing individual styles of writing and were making choices that were less dependent on her suggestions. The students were now comfortable writing essays and were moving towards the target of the essay required in the GED test *(Interview)*.

Teachers as researchers. The team were convinced of the power of the process of 'systematically gathering, analysing and using information on their students. One team member hesitated to use the term "scientific stance" because of misleading associations, but that conveyed the two elements of deliberateness and reflection which were considered essential' *(Interview, project team)*. Only careful documentation over a period would allow patterns to be revealed. A researcher's approach to teaching would enable practitioners to go beyond what intuition, sensitivity and common sense could bring on their own. 'Research' for the team was not simply an honorific term for more alert and attentive teaching but implied the positive adoption of distinct systematic procedures.

An episode in one of the follow-up seminars provided an instance of the value which the team and some participants found in systematic observation and documentation. Addressing one teacher's expressed bafflement and confusion at the failure of her students to make apparent progress, one of the others put it to her that

> '"You know, the question of whether there is something specific holding them back is something that we can't answer without data. It would be useful to be able to say, 'What is holding this person back is so and so'." One of the team added that close observation of the students could help instructionally also; she cited examples' *(Seminar observation)*.

A participant in the current intake group mentioned an awareness she had developed as a result of practising the systematic observation and recording she had learned in AEDP: she was comparing the reading strategies of four students, and 'said she wouldn't have had the knowledge to make this comparison without AEDP. Training enabled you to see more, notice things: AEDP shapes awareness' *(Interview)*. Another teacher

> 'appreciated the concept of ongoing documentation in evaluation and assessment and acknowledged that we don't make time to write it down: she tended to make a note in her head, which was not so good because she was bound to forget it in two or three years time. Documentation was vital for convincing agencies on issues related to individuals: "This person did this ... When I interviewed her again I realised ... "' *(Interview)*.

A third teacher was finding a new intellectual pleasure in employing the research process as a means of illumination. She was determined to

> 'keep fuller journals in future, to document and reflect so as to draw better conclusions and compare teaching methods. She didn't document before, or analyse properly. She now liked the research aspect more than any other, and particularly the coding process for its objectivity, its removal of personal feelings and prejudices' *(Interview)*.

Implicit in the last point may perhaps be a lurking delusion that objectivity free of observer's values is attainable through more systematic research; elsewhere this participant showed a persistent belief in the need for quantifiable measures. Nevertheless, there is no doubt from her testimony that the procedures she had adopted had led to greater knowledge of her students and

improved insights into ways of releasing their energies and confidence as learners.

AEDP saw the solution to the teacher element in the general problem of quality in adult education as essentially a matter of creating a profession, or at least a professional culture, constituents of which would be professional education and a research tradition to generate and constantly revitalise the understandings teachers needed. Research which would make a difference needed to be done by teachers. The way the team viewed research was as the systematic and planned end of a continuum, at the other end of which was habitual reflection in the course of teaching. AEDP was particularly effective, as was generally acknowledged, in putting into the hands of the practitioners the tools they needed for research. It also developed skills, habits and experience in a process the team saw as essential at all points of the teaching-research continuum, that of writing to record, reflect and analyse. Several participants who had not seen themselves as writers had learned to do so, and some who already made a practice of writing found their sense of its possibilities extended. (Others, as we saw, never fully took to the journal form as a means of thinking, maintaining it principally as a simple record -- though they acknowledged the benefits of returning to the record to observe their own development over a period of months.)

Evidence suggested that a good proportion of the teachers had changed and were changing their practice in teaching and assessment as a result of AEDP. The project's success in this was inevitably uneven given the well-known difficulties of changing teachers' entrenched assumptions, and in the face of the unfavourable working situations of some teachers. The *skills and techniques* necessary for changed practice had certainly been imparted to a good number of participants.

6.3 Success and failure in AEDP: contributing factors

AEDP was clearly more successful with some participants than others and it is worth looking for patterns in this. Cases in which less had been gained from the experience sometimes seemed explicable in terms of the particular participants' situations: inexperience coupled with isolation, for instance, together with lack of pre-service training, little help on the job and students with low motivation and very basic literacy abilities. Such a combination of adverse circumstances could overwhelm a teacher's confidence in her ability to improve her students' situation, and undermine her expectations that research activities would provide information which might make a difference to her effectiveness as a teacher. The way the more successful AEDP participants constantly reported new discoveries about their students' resources and new

teaching approaches which had opened up possibilities, was in striking contrast.

The rarity of relative failure, however, shows by contrast how effective AEDP was in general in convincing participants of the value of its approaches and getting them to the point of experiencing benefit from their application. The participant who was probably the most sceptical of those I spoke to had nevertheless been eager to return for the follow-up year, currently put energy into her writing and research, and acknowledged that she derived great satisfaction from the new skills she had developed.

Logically, a concern with assessment issues is secondary to a concern with teaching and learning. Making assessment the focus of AEDP assumed participants who had a conceptual grasp of, and experience in, the curriculum and pedagogy of adult literacy/ESOL education. It would seem plausible that inexperience in adult education might preclude fruitful engagement with AEDP. Numerous cases, however, contradict that conclusion. Two teachers stood out as having limited experience and yet clearly benefiting greatly from the process. Both, however, had teaching experience in other sectors (elementary and high school), and had pursued studies, formally and informally, in education; issues of teaching and learning had been continuing concerns. The critical criterion, then, might not be experience of teaching adult literacy/ESOL so much as a history of engagement, conceptual and practical, with educational problems.

6.4 Impact on programs

The aspirations of AEDP were not simply to influence the group of practitioners who participated in the project each year but to have some effect on the system more widely. Although the form of the evaluation made it unlikely that adequate evidence would be collected on this, some indications are nevertheless worth reporting.

One obvious channel of influence was through the administrator members of the project. The administrator whom I interviewed from the current (1991) group was very clear:

> '[The interviewee] had joined AEDP out of an administrative concern with assessment for initial placement. The alternative assessment techniques learned on AEDP had been implemented and had made a difference. The standardized test had been supplemented by alternative assessment: this had already resulted in some students being placed in

> Level 3 instead of Level 1 (as the test had indicated), with striking effects on the students' confidence. The teachers are happy that they now know more about the students before meeting them: they have the record of the interview and some writing. The resulting documentation is useful politically: the supervisor now trusts [the interviewee's] opinion more, so that she was able (for instance) successfully to argue for an increase of the number of staff involved in the initial placement process' *(Interview)*.

Teacher participants had initiated new assessment practices alongside the existing tests where those were used.

> 'When [the interviewee's] students left her after a few months to go to the Occupational Education teachers, she now sent with them portfolio samples and evaluation sheets as well as the TABE scores, so that the latter could be critically evaluated: the teachers taking over the students might note, for instance, that despite the scores "This person can assimilate and organise data"' *(Interview)*.

Teachers and administrators could also extend the impact of AEDP by relaying its message to others in their programs. There is evidence that this had happened and would continue to happen. One of the participants whose responsibilities included staff development said he 'brings the AEDP materials into his weekly staff development sessions and talks about them;' while a second, who had no opportunity to offer formal training, operationalised her understanding through introducing alternative assessment procedures and instructing her team in their use. Of the regular teachers, one had planned her research project so as to gather evidence with which to influence an area of policy-making in her program (see above, 5.3); and another had, with a colleague who was also an AEDP participant, already conducted workshops for teachers across her community organization:

> 'They have done two presentations on alternative assessment, addressing the issue of whether there is some alternative to the standardized test, one for other teachers in the same employment-oriented program, the other for teachers in [the community organization], 18 teachers in all. They exposed these groups to their own classroom activities, through display and discussion: observation, interviews, portfolios, dialogue journals. Both audiences were receptive. [The interviewee] and her colleague argued that although they could not replace the standardized test teachers should document and keep records, so that when students don't perform well on tests there's an alternative means to prove what they can do. Teachers saw

> the value of the approach, and have started to attempt to implement it, seeking further advice from the two of them' *(Interview)*.

A third teacher had serious intentions of offering workshops on alternative assessment, first at her own site and then at Board of Education Professional Development meetings: 'Documenting and analysing her own classroom work will be her research project; the report will be evidence to present to other teachers that alternative assessment tools work' *(Interview)*.

Amongst the more distant aims of the team in setting up AEDP was to create more public and professional awareness and debate about assessment, and to increase pressure for change in the standard testing arrangements for adult literacy/ESOL education in the city. There is no knowing how far AEDP has in fact contributed to such developments, though it seems likely that through its very identification of assessment as a topic meriting two years of educators' systematic attention, and its high profile (not least with the main agencies, who indicated their agreement by sending participants) it will have reinforced the growing perception of assessment as a critical issue that will have to be tackled.

Some administrators were introducing changes in assessment procedures because of AEDP, and some teachers were actively disseminating their new expertise to others in their programs and organizations. It was too early to judge how effective this process was.

7 AEDP, assessment, and improving adult education

Beyond the local institutional concerns and opportunities that immediately gave rise to the project, might AEDP's approaches form a possible basis for the more general professional development of the community of adult educators?

In the final set of five interviews I received three usable answers to the question, 'How much do you feel AEDP could supply towards a fully adequate professional training, if such were planned?' One said the whole course should be included, though did not say what else would be needed. Another, noting that AEDP was appropriate only for experienced teachers who knew the ills of the standardized test, named the topics which would need to be added: adults as learners distinct from children and how to teach them; the importance of self-concept for adult learners; multicultural awarenesses; teaching through issues like AIDS and healthcare; the situations of adult learners (needs, welfare dependence, concerns); and specific approaches to reading, writing and mathematics. A third considered that AEDP constituted the essential basis of a Masters in AE (which he wished Lehman College

would offer); it had enabled him to look at his own teaching and had given him tools he needed, such as analysis; AEDP's teaching of ethnographic research methods was at Masters or Doctoral level.

One of the features most appreciated about AEDP by some participants was that it had brought them from their marginal position in the education system into contact with the mainstream, by illuminating their own specialism with concepts and readings drawn from central strands in current educational thinking. Some participants saw others within the group as representing that mainstream. A teacher who worked in what she saw as the peripheral specialism of occupational education felt that 'In general it was good that having been very much a detail person herself, somebody who wrote detailed curriculums concerned with mechanics, the project was enabling her to broaden out, making her look at broader issues. Other teachers on the project, she had noted, spoke in broad professional terms. This was the first time that her group, occupational education teachers, had participated in other than basic training' *(Interview)*.

It is worth noting incidentally one specific sense in which AEDP would provide an excellent base on which to ground future projects and curricula: AEDP conspicuously practised what it preached in the area of *documentation*. The team were able to hand me a complete (and very fat) dossier reflecting the project's transactions since its inception. This included agendas and briefing notes which the team had constructed for themselves in preparation for seminars, and which were annotated with notes made for future reference during or after the event, recording how things went and what might have been done differently. In addition, from the second year Deborah Shelton produced detailed 'minutes' of the seminars -- including verbatim citation of exchanges -- for distribution to the participants. Along with these documents, readings and handouts were carefully preserved. Not only did this make the evaluator's job especially easy (I was able, for instance, to 'triangulate' one participant's interview account of her AEDP experience with both her journal and the minutes of the seminars to which she contributed), but a successor project would be able to set out where AEDP left off and have the benefit of its thinking, mistakes and successes; even the team's tacit knowledge, so easily lost when any enterprise comes to an end, is to some extent preserved in the commentaries and memos which these understandings implicitly informed.

Assessment as the focus. The focus of AEDP was not on the total professional development needs of literacy/ESOL teachers but specifically on one issue, assessment. I wondered at first whether this apparently instrumental focus was merely a strategy to seduce hard-headed teachers into thinking more

broadly about the education they were offering. This proved not to be so: AEDP really was about assessment. The team were happy when participants were led by new assessment thinking to reconsider aspects of their pedagogy also, but spin-offs for teaching were seen as just that. (I recorded instances of the team exploiting teachers' fresh ideas about *teaching* to make them aware of related possibilities for *assessment*.)

On the other hand, in the AEDP perspective assessment in significant ways *was* teaching; this was one crucial difference between alternative and traditional assessment. The surprise for the hypothetical hard-bitten practitioner who joined the project would be, not that assessment was just a cover for the real issue of curriculum and pedagogy, but that assessment was something quite different from what he or she, and the devisers of the familiar tests, had always supposed. Assessment was knowing the students. That included, as in the test, knowing what they could do, but knowing it in an elaborated and discriminating way that distinguished what they could do in different circumstances. It also included knowing why the students could do what they did; what the ways of thinking, feeling and operating were that had brought them to, or stopped them at, their current stage of capability; and what they might be expected to become able to do with support.

The adoption of this extended meaning of assessment was not an attempt, through semantic trickery, to switch the agenda back to student-centered education. Rather it was to take seriously the functions which the standardized tests were intended to perform, and to find better ways of fulfilling them. The TABE and GED tests were used for placement within and movement between levels and sectors of education and the employment market, and to measure the effectiveness of programs; if the insistent testimony of team and participants is to be believed, the tests did not do the job well. Students were regularly mislabelled and misplaced in ways that harmed both them and the classes, programs and jobs they were placed in; important progress went unrecognised, while teaching which produced an ability to pass tests but not to function in everyday circumstances served nobody's real needs, except perhaps those of the bureaucracy. Conventional assessment, moreover, left unaddressed a further urgent need, that of providing information on which teaching decisions could be made.

Adequate data for such judgements could be obtained only by other means, notably the collection and recording of more diverse and extensive manifestations of the student's thinking and performance, including, where possible, in the process of education. It is this more extended and ambitious process that is referred to as alternative assessment.

It is the requirement to gather information on students in the course of their education that has far-reaching implications for teaching. Alternative assessment involves careful observation and noting of what students do and say, and analysis of their written work. But as well as carrying out their normal teaching functions with more of an eye and an ear for what is going on in their classes, teachers practising such assessment cannot help changing their teaching behaviour also. They find themselves interacting more with students, eliciting responses and behaviour in order to gather information or test hypotheses, inviting students to evaluate themselves, and sharing insights with students about them and about teaching and learning. The net effect of these assessment-led processes is to change the character of the classroom, a change to which numerous participants testified in detail. Performances elicited under the name of alternative assessment (for instance, in journals, self-assessment reports and interviews) become significant parts of the education process and help to extend students' capabilities. Education becomes a more friendly, supportive, responsive and respectful process, something which students to a greater extent do for themselves rather than which is done to them.

In short, although the overt attempt in this project was not to tackle the whole job of improving the quality of adult education, it in fact made a significant inroad into that broader agenda. If that was what one wanted to do through a program of in-service professional development, there would be worse places to start than with assessment.

AEDP has pioneered a curriculum and pedagogy which in its content and its participative and interactive approach would have much to contribute to any general program of in-service professional development for teachers of adult literacy/ESOL. The issue of assessment was not only an important and effective focus in its own right but proved a highly appropriate vehicle for more general professional development.

8 Conclusions and recommendations

Summary of main evaluation points

The seminars. In general the seminars were highly valued by participants and met several of their most urgent needs: for meeting colleagues from different sites, for sustained examination of their practice and for exposure to and communal reflection on ideas from sources outside the city (particularly through articles). Allowing teachers to meet on a regular basis for extended discussion, organized and informal, was perhaps what participants valued the most about AEDP.

> The informality and collegiality of the management of the seminars made them enjoyable and minimised for less experienced participants any anxieties about contributing to discussion in a large group. Though the approach was at times difficult to handle, it is hard to imagine how a more prescriptive or tightly scheduled approach could have achieved the same ends.
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> There may be room, however, for some tactical concessions to conventional expectations in the early weeks with a group. The team were right in principle to resist pressure to collude with some participants' demands for a heavy loading of information. Conscious thought does, however, need to be given to overcoming participants' early anxieties about whether their investment of time and energy will be worthwhile. Helpful strategies might include demonstrating at the start that significant work existed in alternative assessment and that participants would become familiar with it,. and, second, creating a sense of businesslike briskness in the proceedings (p.26).

The research project. The heavy investment placed by the team in the research project proved generally justified. The project was a valued learning experience that many participants believed resulted in permanent gains in skill and understanding. It was a vehicle through which AEDP's ideas were operationalised and given substance by the teachers within their own contexts. The team were especially skillful and effective in supporting the projects (p.29).

Site visits. Participants felt that site visits provided significant help. They are particularly useful as a means of helping teachers reinterpret their own classrooms in terms of the project's general ideas (p.30).

Readings. No set of readings will entirely suit every teacher, especially when controversial items are included. The selections worked well to raise awareness of issues, stimulate thinking and discussion, and provide knowledge of practice elsewhere.

> There would have been no harm, and something to be gained, in the team's sharing with participants, through handouts, more of their own contextual understandings of the domains from which the articles were drawn. Information could, for instance, have been provided about the nature of the journals and books the items appeared in, the backgrounds and other work of the authors, the range and scope of other articles about the topics, and bibliographic sources available. Such a move might have been an easy way to help assuage some participants'

anxieties about the lack of an information base. Serious reading, beyond the sources given, is in any case part of the professional culture which projects like AEDP seek to create (p.31).

Writing. For reflection and deliberation, not everyone's cognitive style is best served by writing. But it could help more teachers than currently know how to use it. Moreover, if teachers are to adopt a researcher stance towards their work they need techniques of written documentation. The team were right to place the emphasis they did on participants' writing and were successful in convincing a high proportion of participants of the value of writing for their own work (p.32).

The balance of activities. The combination of meetings, research projects, site visits, reading and writing was one of the distinctive contributions of AEDP and worked well, enabling elements to reinforce each other and ideas to be the more securely understood through being handled in a number of media and contexts. It also helped to ensure that theory and practice informed each other (p.33).

Follow-up year. Participants who took part in the follow-up seminar were unanimous as to its value. In part the smaller group size was a factor, but in addition, after a full year's work and a completed research project, teachers were at this stage in a position to achieve maximum benefit from working together (p.34).

Participants' experience of AEDP. Participants were overwhelmingly approving of AEDP. They enjoyed their involvement and thought they learned a great deal from it. They appreciated the team's seriousness, expertise and respect for what the teachers brought with them, and the climate of open interaction which was created. Some had conspicuously acquired new professional skills, beyond the usual classroom ones, such as writing and systematic inquiry.

Administrators' needs were somewhat different but it seemed that these could be successfully accommodated within a group basically consisting of teachers, and that there were advantages in their participation.

In relation to participants' overall approval of AEDP, criticisms were minor. Some dissatisfactions concerned the amount of what was variously referred to as 'information' and 'theory'. But participants were confused on this point, perhaps indicating a need for some explicit discussion of what 'theory' is: the respects, for instance, in which it can be given and those in which it can be grasped only through active

engagement with problems, and the fact that it may be manifested not only in formal exposition but in the treatment of substantive issues and experiences (p.39).

Changes in practice. Evidence suggested that a good proportion of the teachers had changed and were changing their practice in teaching and assessment as a result of AEDP. The project's success in this was inevitably uneven given the well-known difficulties of changing teachers' entrenched assumptions, and in the face of the unfavourable working situations of some teachers. The *skills and techniques* necessary for changed practice had certainly been imparted to a good number of participants (p.44).

Effects on programs. Some administrators were introducing changes in assessment procedures because of AEDP, and some teachers were actively disseminating their new expertise to others in their programs and organizations. It was too early to judge how effective this process was (p.47).

AEDP and professional development. AEDP has pioneered a curriculum and pedagogy which in its content and its participative and interactive approach would have much to contribute to any general program of in-service professional development for teachers of adult literacy/ESOL. The issue of assessment was not only an important and effective focus in its own right but proved a highly appropriate vehicle for more general professional development (p.50).

Recommendations

1 AEDP's effective combination of activities combined with the focus on assessment is worth repeating and expanding.

2 There is a need, more generally, for a professional context in which teachers of adult literacy/ESOL from different institutions and programs can meet regularly, minimally to share ideas and experiences and ideally to build a common knowledge culture through systematic joint inquiry.

3 Additional resources available to a future project could be valuably deployed on regular site visits, which greatly enhance the effectiveness of the training.

4 With bimonthly meetings two years are needed for teachers to gain the full benefit from a program like AEDP. Organizations which restrict teachers' release to one year may risk losing their investment because changes in thinking and practice are not securely enough established.

5 Thought needs to be given to the relationship between an AEDP type of program and more academic studies. Providers need to be clear -- and explicit with participants -- about such issues as what theory means in the current project, what knowledge and information could usefully be presented as such, whether any part of the aim is to lead some teachers toward more academic study, and the respects in which the standards and criteria normally applied to research for, say, a master's degree are appropriate or inappropriate for the studies teachers undertake in relation to their own practice. A project's view on these matters would affect, for instance, the way readings and references were presented, whether and how participants were introduced to bibiographic sources, and the rigor with which claims in their papers were critiqued.

6 A future project might include funding to provide continuing support for teachers and administrators undertaking to disseminate new approaches through workshops in their organizations.

APPENDIX

Construction of the Sample of Participants

The strategy was agreed with the team that participants from the first two intakes would be interviewed once and from the current intake twice. The number of participants it would be possible to interview during visits to the city was judged to be about twelve. Selection criteria were agreed with the team to yield representation of all the categories they considered significant. These were, for the two earlier years: the degree of benefit which in the team's judgement they had derived from participation in AEDP, and participation in the follow-up year; and for all years: experienced or inexperienced in their current area of teaching; type of students taught (ESOL, ABE, beginner, advanced); and type of organization (of the four targeted in the design of AEDP). A list of all participants for all three years, marked with these categories and with additional written comments, was provided by the team. I made a long-list selection from these by a mechanical process, indicating first choices and reserves. Substitutions were later made, by agreement with the team, for selected participants who could not be contacted for interview, were unavailable or whose sites were so remote that the time spent in visiting them would have severely reduced the number of interviews which could be conducted. (A number of participants were in the event interviewed at Lehman College while they were attending the seminar.) The difficulties in these respects proved considerable, so that the resulting sample, particularly of the 1989 group, was less balanced than might have been hoped.

The characteristics of the sample of 11 as finally agreed and interviewed were as follows:

From the 1989 participants, 3 were interviewed; from 1990, 4 (the whole of the current follow-up group with the exception of one auditor); from 1991, 4.

Participants varied in how useful the team estimated AEDP had been to them, though most were thought to have derived substantial benefit; they tended to confirm these estimations. Participants thought to have learned little were both fewer in numbers and more likely to have lost contact with the project, less readily reachable for interview, and less willing to give their time to assist the evaluation. For similar reasons participants who had not joined the follow-up groups were not able to be included.

In the other categories (level of experience, type of student, type of organization, the sample was well mixed.

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